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Normal, Ill., and the Illinois  
Central Railroad

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY





# NORMAL, ILLINOIS, and the Illinois Central Railroad

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Chartered on February 10, 1851, the Illinois Central Railroad was the greatest railway project of its day. The 705-mile route of the railroad was twice the length of that of any other existing railway.

At the time the Illinois Central was being constructed, only 13 towns of more than 100 population existed along its lines. Among these was Bloomington with about 1,500 inhabitants.

The building of the Illinois Central had a profound effect on the growth of Illinois. All along its lines towns began to take root. Thousands of acres of fertile farmlands were brought under cultivation. Industry sprang up everywhere. Shortly following construction, schools were built. The story of Illinois Central cooperation to assist in-

stitutions of higher learning in getting a start is a matter of historical record. Throughout its 106 years of life the Illinois Central has worked with schools and colleges along its lines. Illinois State Normal University, University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University are but three of the more than 250 colleges and universities which today make their homes in Illinois Central cities and towns.

Asahel Gridley came to Bloomington a year before Jesse Fell, October 8, 1831. Both of these men were responsible for 'laying out' towns in central Illinois. Fell was responsible for Clinton and Normal and Gridley aided in establishing Lexington and LeRoy. Fell was the first lawyer in Bloomington, David Davis the third and Asahel



MODERN motive power helps to keep Illinois Central trains "on the advertised."





Illinois Central Railroad passenger station and crossing with the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Railroad at Normal, Ill.

Gridley the sixth. Gridley was elected to the State Legislature in 1840. He was in the State Senate at the time of fixing the location of the Illinois Central in 1851. According to Gridley's account he met Robert Rantoul, one of the incorporators of the railroad, and by arrangement secured the location of the Illinois Central Railroad 'within five miles of the line of Town. 22, Range 2 East which brought it to within two miles of Bloomington, and on the same line as Decatur and Clinton. They had to build 50 miles of the road within two years from the time they obtained the charter, and they built that 50 miles from LaSalle to Bloomington.' <sup>1</sup>

The Senate of the Illinois Legislature by a vote of 23 to 2 passed the Central Railroad Bill, February 6, 1851. The only point made on the Central road between the southern termini of the canals and Cairo was the location described by Senator Gridley

within five miles of the northeast corner of Township 21 North, Range 2 East of the Third Principal Meridian.

The *Western Intelligencer* carried a communication from Gridley stating, 'The great difficulty has been in determining the point to which the road should be constructed; and inasmuch as there has been but one point fixed in the whole state (except the termini as fixed by the act of Congress), I think the citizens of said counties (McLean, De Witt and Macon) are fortunate . . . . .'<sup>2</sup> Bloomington was in a direct line from four miles west of said northeast corner to LaSalle, on the termination of the canal. This fact secured the road to Bloomington. A bill passed the Senate a few days before extending the charter of the Alton and Sangamon Railroad Company to Bloomington.<sup>3</sup> Gridley's

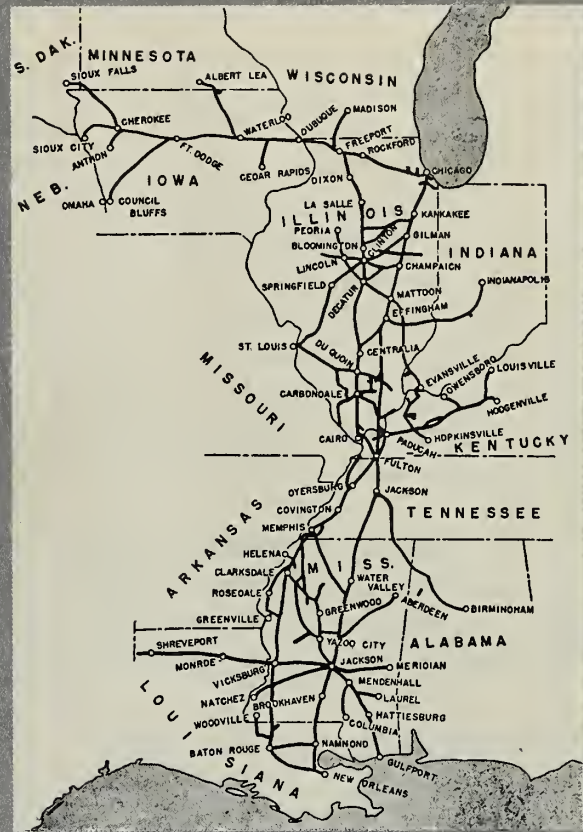
1. J. H. Burnham, *History of Bloomington and Normal in McLean County, Illinois* (Bloomington: J. H. Burnham, Publisher 1879) p. 45.

2. *Western Intelligencer*. As quoted in Burnham, *op.cit.*, Carlton J. Corliss, *Main Line of Mid-America* (New York; Creative Age Press 1950) p. 27.

3. *Ibid.*



The Illinois Central Railroad - 1857. 705 miles of railroad serving Illinois.



The Illinois Central Railroad - 1957. 6,500 miles of railroad serving 14 states.

action in the Legislature insured the coming of railroads to Bloomington. David Davis, Jesse Fell and Isaac Funk were among those deeply interested in these activities.

Ground was first broken at the Bloomington end of the sixth division of the Central Road, May, 1852, adjacent to the residence of Judge David Davis. For distance of one mile north of the depot grounds through the premises of Judge Davis, Wm. F. Flagg and Joshua R. Fell, a goodly amount of grading was done by June 18, 1852.<sup>4</sup>

The cars ran from LaSalle to Bloomington, May 23, 1853. Cars ran on the Chicago and Mississippi from Springfield to Bloomington, October 16, 1853.<sup>5</sup>

The construction of the LaSalle section brought a famous railroad figure into prominence. General Grenville M. Dodge, later known in the Civil War

and as chief engineer of the first railroad to span the Rockies, was active here in Illinois. Timothy B. Blackstone was the divisional engineer in charge. A. D. Abbott was the contractor in charge of the first regular train from LaSalle to Bloomington. The run from LaSalle to Bloomington occupied at least four hours.<sup>6</sup>

When the tract of 160 acres was chosen in 1857 for the location of Illinois State Normal University it was located north of the St. Louis, Alton and Chicago Railroad and west of the Illinois Central Railroad in close proximity to the point of intersection. It was expected that students from any part of the state would be conveyed directly to the Junction on one of the two great railroads crossing at this point. It was also believed that the fame of the new institution, the first publicly supported university of higher learning in Illinois, would be spread by its proximity to these railroads.<sup>7</sup>

4. Helen Cavanagh. *Funk of Funks Grove (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing Company, 1952) pp. 112, 113 from Bloomington Intelligencer.*

5. Burnham, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

6. *LaSalle (Ill.) Post-Tribune*, May 23, 1928.

7. *Bloomington Weekly Pantagraph*, May 20, 1857



For several months trains connected with the Illinois Central at the Junction in Normal (North Bloomington). It was thought in 1852 that these roads might cross near this place. North Bloomington, as it was first called, was projected and platted in early part of 1854. Jesse Fell was the driving force in this activity. He located his family residence here in 1855. There was one inhabitant before 1855, a Mr. McCambridge, whose home was at the crossing of the railroads. As agent he attended to the interests of the lines crossing at the Junction. The freight house of the Central was constructed in 1871.<sup>8</sup>

The coming of the Illinois Central to this part of Illinois brought an avenue of transportation and another source for sale of land. Railroad lands were soon purchased by people in the counties ad-

jacent on the line. New settlers came in numbers. Gridley acted as agent for the railroad in the Bloomington area.


From its beginning as an Illinois railroad, the Illinois Central has grown to a system with 6,500 miles of line serving 2,000 cities and towns in 14 states of Mid-America.

The interest which the Illinois Central has long displayed in the area of education continues to this day. Wayne A. Johnston, president of the railroad, serves as an elected trustee of the University of Illinois at Urbana. He is also a trustee of De Pauw University at Greencastle, Indiana. In addition to cooperative research which the Illinois Central has worked with colleges and universities, along its route, many Illinois Central officers and employees act as instructors in various schools imparting their knowledge to students who will be the transportation men of tomorrow.

8. *Burnham, op. cit.*, pp. 116, 117, 136.







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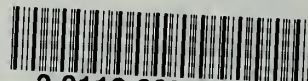
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